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*The Worker
and other
Poems*

Dawson



In memory of William H. Bonsall
A.B. Stanford '34, LL.B. Harvard '38

From the fund given by his parents
Samuel N. Bonsall and
Mabel Bowler Bonsall, A.B. '11

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THE WORKER
AND OTHER POEMS

The  Co.

THE WORKER

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

CONINGSBY WILLIAM DAWSON

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New York

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U

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

WHO HAVE WORKED FOR, AND BEEN PATIENT WITH, ME
THESE MANY YEARS, WITH AN UNTIRING TENDER-
NESS, AND TO WHOM WHATEVER IDEALS THERE
ARE TO BE FOUND IN THESE PAGES ARE
DIRECTLY DUE
I INSCRIBE THIS MY FIRST BOOK
AS A MEMORIAL OF
MY LOVE

▼



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A POET'S PRAYER

*Give me to sing the songs that must be sung ;
Not vagrant echoes of the thing last said,
Nor lamentable words caught up among
Hollows where leaden skies are splashed with red,
And startled eyes strain at departing day
O'er barren lands where Autumn hath begun.
Nor let my utterance be over-gay,
Lest valiant Faith less-swift Belief outrun.
Speaking sincerely whatsoever I find
Of grand impulses in the heart of Man
(Yet not too bravely lest I seem unkind
To frailer courage), singing as I can
Of lips that loved in death on Calvary,
May grievous men grow glad because of me.*

THE WORKER AND OTHER POEMS

THE WORKER

HOME from his work at last. Thank God, the task
Of living and of dying has an end.
Though long postponed, it comes at length to all,
When love nor hate shall grieve our gentle hearts.

Out in the twilit streets the traffic roared,
Calling him back insistently to work.
And here and there a yellow gas-lamp flared,
And under it some ragged children played.
Leaving the street, he slowly climbed the stair,
And paused to listen for the little voice.
Then climbed again more hurriedly.

“Perhaps

She is asleep, and does not hear my tread,
Or she is resting near the window-pane
Counting the stars, or else she hears my
tread
And hides to kiss me on the darkened stair,
Or else —”

He reached the topmost step and stood
Expectantly, holding his panting breath,
But when no little hand caressed his hand,
He opened wide the door, and entered in.
Stretched out upon a tumbled bed she lay,
The little palms turned outward as for love,
The rosy mouth half opened as in speech,
The eyes quite shut, the narrow body
stripped.
Sitting him down beside the quiet child,
He made no utterance, nor kissed his dead.

Somewhere without he heard a drunken curse,
And a child whimper. All was still again,
And silence settled down with bated breath.
The moon crept in and looked upon her face,
And washed the naked body, and withdrew,
Still motionless he sat, nor kissed his dead.
Like to one wakened suddenly he sat,
With hands flung back, and rigid staring face,
Looking for breath between the cold, dead lips,
And thought, — and thought.

“Thank God, the frightful task
Of living and of dying has an end.
Though long postponed, it comes at length to
all,
When love nor hate shall grieve our gentle hearts.
Why were men made to labour and to die?
Each day to him was tedious and long
Until she came.”

He looked down at his clothes
And saw them all befouled with grease and dirt,
And his hands swollen wretchedly with toil,
And knew himself for vile as his vile task.
The shabby room with its cheap furniture
And grime-stained walls closed in upon his life.
For him, the stars were fallen out of heaven, —
The sun charred to a monstrous flake of soot, —
The moon extinguished, — God dead utterly,
Sprawled out across His strange experiment.

Left palpitant, one live reality
Watched the black God-destroying thunders roll
Across the ruined battlefield of Him,
And in the midst a naked, tumbled child.

“Gray days, gray days and darkness in the night,
Long days of travailing, black nights of pain,

Working and weeping till the last thing left
Of all God's handiwork drops out of sight,
And these misshapen hands resume to clay.
God tripped, and stumbled on her as He fell.
I cannot blame Him, cannot pity her,
For blame and pity both went out when He
Clutched at the clouds, rocked sideways in His path,
And laid convulsive fingers on the stars,
And crashed across the pleasure He had made."

Gazing with sorrow on the quiet child,
He made no utterance, nor kissed his dead.

Next door he heard a woman groan, — a door
Grate on its hinges, — and the muffled sound
Of those who run the floor with stockinged feet, —
And whispers, — and the woman's loud complaint.
Already night was turned from black to gray.

An early wagon rumbled up the street,
And splashed the silence into lapping waves
Which sank again with sobbing when 'twas past.
The siren of an outward-going ship
Shrieked to the world that daybreak had begun.
A weary city turned upon its side,
And argued for another hour of sleep,
And sighed, — and tossed an arm, — and slept
again.

Stretched out upon the tumbled bed she lay,
Her half-turned face trembling toward a smile,
Her naked body couched reposefully
And flung apart, as though for the first time
Her rest was ultimate, and knew no pain.
The hair strayed back from off her sleeping face
As though a mother's hand had laid it there.
And so her rest was utter, and she slept.

And still he spoke no word, nor kissed his dead.

Scrooping of chairs, — a window opened wide, —
A woman's groan, — the sound of running feet, —
An oath, — and last of all a baby's cry.
A strangled, struggling, plaintive little wail,
As though already the strong race for life
Had overwhelmed this latest traveller.

“And if with tearfulness we enter life,
Should we not welcome death with laughing eyes?”
He rose, and craned far out into the air,
Blinking upon the sun with sullen eyes,
And heard the noise of sparrows in the roof.
A yellow mist had filled the squalid street
And smudged the firmament to green and gray.

“And was God dead?”

He heard the stealthy tread
Of a belated reveller, and looked
And saw the tattered wanderer's return.
Her hat lurched sideways on her faded hair,
Her skirt bedraggled, clinging close about
Her starveling body, drenched throughout with
mist.

Hearing a motion, with one desperate smile
She lifted up an evil, tragic face,
And wearily coquetted with her hand.
And seeing him stare down on her unmoved,
Muttered a brutal word, and staggered on.

“Scarce twenty, and her face is lined and old.”

He turned upon the innocent dead face
And sacred smiling of the childish lips,
And saw the tender curves her body made,

And thought of her whose hand had waved to
him,

And how her face had once been innocent.

Going upon his knees, he knelt to pray,

Calling aloud upon the fallen God,

He begged for strength from Him he counted
dead.

Then suddenly the mist sank out of sight

And God uprose, and most compassionately

Made glory through the dingy attic-panes,

And smiled to see the smile upon her lips.

A distant clock struck out the morning hour.

Rising, he spoke with God and kissed his dead,

And gathered up his tools, and went to work.

Next door, the baby gave a feeble cry.

Fronting his dead, he looked before he went,

And saw his clothes befouled with grease and dirt,
And his hands swollen wretchedly with toil,
And thought himself for vile as his vile task.
And yet he offered up a meagre prayer
For the life taken, and the life new-given.
He kissed again her smiling childish lips,
And laughed and whistled on his way to work,
And laughed and whistled at his heavy toil
As often as he saw her baby mouth
And naked body stretched, as if in sleep, —
And bared his head.

“Thank God, the dreary task
Of living and of dying has an end,
Though long postponed, it comes at length to all,
When love nor hate shall grieve our gentle hearts.”

At evening he returned, and kissed his dead.



TO A FRIEND FOREGONE

DIM, distant, terminating, far,
Like a black night with one white star
The path appears which I have trod —
And at the end of it you are.

As I had left you yesterday
Your shadow lies along the way
With hands outstretched and parted lips,
As if, with pleading, it would say: —

“What of the old communing voice
Which you and I were wont to use,
And solitary paths we had,
And converse we were wont to choose —
Or did God give us any choice?”

Then loud the hinge of memory creaks,
The door swings outward, and the streaks
Of golden sunset stain the wall,
And olden glory shines, and speaks

Of how in former days we talked,
And intimately often walked,
And whispered of the things we feared,
While through the clouds the veiled moon
stalked.

You know what solemn words were said
When hand-in-hand with low-bowed head
We wandered sullen gas-lit streets
Of London, and the day was dead.

How at the midnight hour we prayed
That God might keep us undismayed

By any poor external dreads
And make us brave — and not afraid.

Of how He answered us awhile
And kept at bay the carking, vile,
And petty throngs of jealousy,
And froze Death's finger on the dial.

How we were parted at the last
As swimmers spent, about a mast
See their tenacious grasp unloose,
And know their strength is overpast,

And, gazing in another's eyes,
Watch where the life within him dies,
Though loving, may not rescue him,
And fearful wait for him to rise.

So were we parted on a day
And for a time quite speechless lay;

TO A FRIEND FOREGONE

I wondered why the world was glad
Though God had taken you away.

Dim, distant, terminating, far,
Like a black night with one white star
The path appears which I have trod,
And at the end of it you are, —
But you and I are one in God.

THE TRYST

HERE we must part,
Our ways have led together
Through sun and shadow,
Night and noonday shade.
Nay, tender heart,
I could not live forever
Though love we had. How
Leaf and flower fade
Each of us know —
We know.

Here we must part,
For Life is one departure,
Dreaming and waking,
Sleep and sudden death,
From when we start.

But shall we not be heart-sure,
Strong comfort taking
With the indrawn breath,
Whilst we have love —
We love.

What though we part?
Our lives shall walk together
In dreamland pasture.
When at night we sleep,
Sharing one heart,
We journey onward ever,
One to the last. Your
Eyes must never weep.
Think of the night —
Our night.

Kiss ere we part —
Why, death may draw us nearer.

From the Hereafter
There is sure return.
Swift I shall dart
And find you ever dearer
With song and laughter.
This I now discern
Writ on God's brow —
God's brow.

ANCHORED WINGS

“ANCHORED Wings, Anchored Wings,
Neath a golden sun,
We shall spread our silver sails
When the day is done, —
Spread our canvas to the night
When the day is done.

“Anchored Wings, Anchored Wings,
In a running sea
Soon will cross the harbor bar
Moving silently,
Lighted by the solemn moon,
Moving silently.

“Anchored Wings, Anchored Wings,
Courage, it is night.

Stretch your pinions o'er the waves,
None can stay our flight,
Race beneath the little stars,
None can stay our flight."


Contentedly he rose when night drew nigh
And all the hurry of the sun gone by,
With weariness of working overpast,
And proudly took the helm of his own life,
And out beyond the bourne of petty strife
Drifted toward eternal things at last.

"What mastery can now possess my soul?
Now am I free to navigate the whole
Magnificence of heaven's waterways,
Where men have set no artificial bound
To my ambitious heart-beats, and no sound
Of any warning voice my course delays."

And speaking thus, he journeyed up the stars,
And left behind the mother eye of Mars,
And smote the postern of the Great Unknown,
And entered in, and tarried there that night
With Gods out-worshipped, till the morning light
Returned him mystic-mazed, and quite alone.

But, though he woke, a calmness stayed with him
Which circled in his soul against the grim
And monstrous voices of the world he walked, —
For him there ran an echo through the day
Of star-lit mistlands where the wise ones lay,
Who through the spellbound night with him had
talked.

Long had he dreamt his many-colored dreams,
Gazing in ecstasy upon the streams
Of half-formed hopes and soft bewilderments, —
Women with faces veiled who won his eyes,



Gray veils which hid the mocking and the lies
Suggesting passions huge as firmaments.

And thus he hid the ragged-wounded heart
Of one world-weary, waiting to depart
In quest of other worlds and older years,
Where Wisdom still pursues her lonely way,
And leaves a track for whosoever may
Affront the dangers, casting off his fears.

So, when the world had boisterously tried
To humble him, and sneeringly denied
His power to dream, he lifted up his head
With singing — half a song and half a sigh —
To where betwixt man's babel and the sky
The silver shadow of the moon was shed;—


“Anchored Wings, Anchored Wings,
Patience for a day,

ANCHORED WINGS

We may reach the blue lagoons
Once we slip away,
Venture to the Happy Isles
Once we sail away.

“Anchored Wings, Anchored Wings,
All the world is ours,
We shall traverse Ilium,
Drift beneath her towers,
Hear the ancient seas of Greece
Lap her ancient towers.

“Anchored Wings, Anchored Wings,
Day is overpast,
Peace is in the ocean's heart,
Evening comes at last.
Spread our canvas to the night,
Evening comes at last.”



THE ORCHARD OF SONG


O SOUND of laughing boys midst falling leaves
And cherry blossom shaken after night,
How am I fain of all your young delight
When in the barns there stand my gathered
sheaves!

Far on the hillside Autumn gleans the fields
With long lean hands, and garners everything —
But here within your orchard it is Spring,
And every tree a leafy banner yields. —
Alas for labor and alas for play,
Time gives an end to every night and day.

My lonely self shall pause awhile to rest
And watch you at your mimic braveries,
To dream once more the happy memories

Of morning hours when Life was loveliest.
I dwelt here once, but could not always wait —
And each of you shall shortly go away
Giving some poor excuse, shall leave your play,
Departing by the ready open gate. —
Pluck crocus blooms in every way you can,
Spring flowers come but once to any man.

For you our Lord has many sweet delays
And resting-places on the winding road,
Where weary men may ease them of their load,
And lie at peace by reed-fringed waterways.
Yet none more gentle than this garden scene
Has ever touched mine eyes to quiet tears,
For here no flaming-future panic steers
With frenzied feet adown the distant green. —
Alas for labor and alas for play,
Time gives an end to every night and day.



Your dancing feet make music with the leaves,
O, I am fain of all your young delight.
Safe in the barn there stand my garnered
 sheaves,
And Autumn gleans my fields both day and
 night;
With gaunt gray hands she stoops to everything,
Nor spares the consolation of a rose,
But makes a moaning everywhere she goes.
Yet here within your orchard it is Spring. —
Make haste, dear boys, embrace a singing heart
Which shall make music when you too depart.

THE PASSAGE OF LOVE

“O LOVE was ever thus,
A pleasant thing to fondle and to play with;
A thing to laugh with, — not a thing to stay
with;
Love was ever thus.”

And so he left her in the early day
Standing alone, nor ever turned his head,
But thanked his God because he had not wed
This first fair girl, and smiled and went his way.

“O Love was ever thus. I know full well
How daintily our first tall mother took
The vital tree with rosy hands, and shook
The fatal fruit, and ran to where it fell.”

“A pleasant thing to fondle,” so he said,
“To hold between two hands, and so to play with,
A thing to laugh with, not a thing to stay with,
A godlike toy — but not a thing to wed.”

But she, she ne'er so much as moved or stirred,
But gazed with mournful eyes across the green,
And knew each blemish where his foot had been
Pressed on the flowers when he said that word,

And thought it not a blemish, for said she,
“His kindness left these marks in memory
Of all the old delight that I and he
Once had — before this burden fell on me.”

“And Love was ever thus, — a sacred thing,
Too dear to God a mortal man to stay with;
Too much like Sin,—a pleasing friend to play with,
Who changes faces as we closer cling.”

And so at first offence he left her side,
But found the sun grow darker as he went,
For overhead the forest trees had bent
Their boughs in silent shame his shame to hide.

No star, nor moon looked down encouragement,
Nor ever any bird was heard to sing,
For Sorrow laid her hand on everything,
And drove abroad her gray equipage.

And then he thought of her, and how her kiss
Had warmed his blood, and how her little arms
Were magical to save him from alarms;
And so he said, "I will return for this."

* * * * *

She stood amid the blazing marigold,
And cast her eyes along the weary way
Of flowers wounded in the early day
By him for whom her love was manifold.

About the hour of peace and sunset light
The forest moaned, and from it burst a man,
Who staggered through the brambles where he ran,
And lifted up a haggard face and white.

“Your arms, your arms,” he cried, “O hold me fast,
Protect me with your kisses from the night.”
And she encircled him till morning light,
And warmed him till his fears were overpast.

And when the sun was up they sang together,
She teaching him the words of their twin song,
And kissing him if he should sing it wrong,
And this refrain they sang together ever:—

“O Love was ever thus,
A thing to work for, and a thing to pray for,
Which surely comes, — a patient thing to stay for,
Love was ever thus.”

SINGING FOR FLO

HEIGHO, little Flo,
Where the gentle breezes blow,
In a shadowed woodland way
I met you on a summer's day,
Why we parted, you best know.

Heigho, little Flo,
Tell me where the seasons go,
When Love waves his dimpled hand
We all obey the boy's command;
Should I ask him he might know.

Heigho, little Flo,
Cupid must have raised his bow,
For I feel last Autumn's pain
Requicken in my heart again;
Was it Cupid? You best know.

BEING A POET

“GIVE us a song to sing!” the people cried.
“Being a poet, thou canst give us joy
In lyric shape, so that our dullest day
May wear the glad surprise of summer suns;
So that our weary may be strong again;
So that our speechless may be eloquent
With utterance, and thunder-trailing words;
So that the saddest of us all may dance
With laughter on his bruised and pallid lips,
And braid his arms about another’s neck,
Parting the hair, may kiss the Time-worn brow,
Gazing with passion on forgotten eyes.
Thou canst restore to us our dear dead days,
Our youthfulness and immemorial hopes,

And make distinct the visions that were ours.
Being a poet, thou canst touch the eyes
Of ancient women and o'erlabored men,
Stretching cool fingers on their burning balls,
And blotting out the redness of their lids,
Canst give again the sight of tossing foam,
And mystery of ocean-going ships,
And joy of little children at their play.
Being a poet, thou canst raise our dead,
Folding thine arms about the quiet corpse,
Whispering in the porches of the ear
Compelling music, — straining with thy lips
Canst cause the bloom of life to spread
again
Over the ashen cheeks of those we loved.
Being a poet, thou canst save the world,
By tender dealings with our withered lives.”
Thronging about him with their lidless eyes,

And laying on of gnarled and knotted hands,
And lifting up of listless, wailing babes,
And the unclean display of festering sores,
They urged his lofty spirit to rebel
Against their squalor.

Daintily aside

He drew his broidered mantle from their grasp,
And gathered up his backward-flowing hair,
Flinging the gleaming locks across his breast,
And, smiling proud defiance, sung this song.

God made a golden daffodil
And burnished it with flame,
And placed it on a sheltered hill.

A day passed by, and evening came,
And the black shadows spread, —
An ancient people none could tame.


The golden flower bowed its head,
Because the sun was gone,
And all her petals flushed to red.

But evening soon was overworn;
From out the woods stole night,
And countless little stars were born.

A cloud sank down, and into sight
Floated a quiet moon,
Dressing the drooping flower in white.

"And I may die so very soon,"
The daffodilly wept,
"I that was gold this afternoon."

Around the hills the pale dawn crept;
Stretched out upon damp mould
The weary little flower slept.




And then the sun grew very bold,
And flew the sky o'erhead.
The daffodil lay still and cold.

And when God came, He found instead
Of red or white, a gold
Ungracious flower, already dead.

They listened to the music of his voice;
And now a thin, consumptive girl would choke,
And now a sickly child would wake and sob
Until its mother bared her shrunken breasts
And painfully bestowed her little life.
And he, the poet, sang to them of flowers
Which perished of their dreary discontent,
And robbed God of the fragrance He had given.
Then, as they learnt the burden of his song,
And how he lightly looked upon their pain,

Rebuking them because they suffered so,
A savage silence broke upon his calm
And measured flow of words, smiting him dumb.
Their dreadful hollow eyes consumed his soul,
And found scant joy for all his scented locks,
And gentle figure poised in ridicule,
His delicate curved mouth and boyish face.

At last a stricken man of many years
Crawled up to him, with toothless mouth, and said
No spoken word, but placed his crippled hand
Upon the strong young arm and slowly led
Unto the city gates, and thrust him forth.
And all the grievous crowd looked out and hissed
Offence about a golden daffodil.
And wondered whether it were white or red,
And if 'twere red, well! would God find it gold?
And if 'twere white, could it survive the morn?



And if 'twere dead, — what difference would it
make

To sun or hillside, — least of all to God?
And so they taunted him, and bitterly
Sneered down upon his upturned anguished face,
Because he had not healed them of their sores.

With mantled head and backward spreading
hands

He wandered to a dark and desert place,
Saw the sun blaze in violet and blood
Behind the hollow towers of his home,
And totter down the precipice of night
Leaving no rumor of the way he went.
A wind sprang up and sobbed about his path,
Ran on a pace and stopped, and circled round,
Catching his raiment, hurried him along,
Telling him how his life had failed, failed, failed.

“God made a golden daffodil,” it sighed,
“And burnished it with flame, a living flame,
But when the evening came its leaves were red.”
He looked down at his feet, lo! they were red,
And all the stones were crimson where he trod.
There was a languor in his aching limbs,
A notion of lost strength, — lost power to live,
And in his ears the gray monotony
Of unreturning and desirable
Echoes of silver laughter in May fields,
And secret merriment of woodland brooks.

He stared with vacant eyes into the dusk,
Feeling the touch of cold, unliving things;
Nor shrank, nor wept, but rested low his chin
Between his icy hands, and saw his life
Like some sand-throttled oriental stream
Wander away, till, growing less and less

It vanished where the sky-line had begun.

“I am a poet, yet I have not sung
Of men who toil unthanked and unbeloved,
Losing their souls from midnight unto morn,
In dismal places carven underground.”


When thus he spoke, the moon rose swiftly up,
And pitifully robed him all in white.

Then he remembered that his song had sung
Of how a cloud sank down, and into sight
Floated a quiet moon, whilst all in white
The little flower stood and bowed its head
Because it knew that shortly it must die;
And once it had been golden, stained with red.
Folding the lids before his tired eyes
He saw afresh the gaunt and famished world
Hold up to him a foul, disfigured face
For the on-laying of his God-like hands,

And restoration of the banished hope.
Out of the dusk relentlessly there rose
Women with listless children at their breasts,
And laboring men with mutilated hands,
Anæmic youths with brave heroic dreams
That should make singing, had they power to
sing;

And midnight hours when bodies are defiled
And devastated souls find rest in death,—
And the hereditary load of sin
Floats down the slimy ages to applause
Of childish hands held out in ecstasy
To claim this new adventure for their own.

And so he strove to sing another song,
More comfortable, that should raise the dead
And nourish the faint-hearted with new life,
Bring back the sparkle to the eyes of men,



Making them brave and swelling out their hearts;
Restoring tears to such as had forgot
The way of weeping and of laughing men,
And strengthen arms to give the last embrace
Of dying men to those that are to die.
And striving thus, about the hour of dawn,
His head sank lower and his hair fell wide,
Robing his body round in flaming gold.
In vain desire he struggled with his lips,
Bruising his tongue against his fast-locked teeth,
Straining to utter all the pain he felt
In one strange warning that should save the
world,
Being a poet.

But the heart in him
Could not encompass such a mighty song.
As the first torch of dawn flashed through the sky
The heart within him died and broke in twain,

Leaving the hair of gold spread o'er his face
To glisten in the light of early morn,
And greet the glad surprise of summer suns,
And hide the pain of his contorted lips.

* * * * *

Within the city men rose up and ran
To climb the bastions and scan the hills
For any trace of him they had thrust forth
In foolish passion on the yester-night,
With grievous words.

From very far away
They saw the flashing of his golden head,
And caught a fragrance of spring daffodils,
Causing their eyes to sparkle with strange tears,
And their dumb men to speak inspired words,
And their dead children waking up to smile,
And their faint-hearted to be brave again,
But could not see the blue, contorted lips.



So the consumptive girl ran forth and played
Mid falling blossoms by a splashing stream,
And ever saw the flashing of his hair
Upon the distant hill and waved her hand,
Singing about a golden daffodil;
But could not see the blue, contorted lips.

Being a poet, he had saved the world.

REAL LIFE AND DREAM LIFE

If life were only as the things we dream,
Then you and I would never part nor meet,
But walk the world with silence-sandalled feet
In twilit fields of breathless asphodel,
And know ourselves for that which now we
seem, —

If life were only as the things we dream.

Then Time and Space would pass away together,
And Death would take the fragile hand of Sleep,
With folded wings would vanish in the deep
Forgotten distance, whilst we twain would dwell
Reprieved from any change of summer weather, —
If Time and Space would pass away together.

Then should I find your face unfading fair,
Nor mark the crimson tide of cruel scorn,
Or sweet disfigurement wan tears had worn,
But in your eyes the vague, ineffable
Betokenings of love, and dreamlands, where
Your face would be for me unfading fair.

If Joy for us should take the place of Sorrow,
Think you, dear heart, that we should happier be?
Could Love's accomplishment be loverly
If Life and Love should everywhere do well?
Or should we have new hope for any morrow, —
If Joy for us should take the place of Sorrow?

If Changelessness should take the place of Change,
Then joy of meeting would be ours no more.
The grief of parting that we knew before
And trustfulness that made us infidel

To unbelief, would find us cold and strange, —
If Changelessness should take the place of Change.

If Life were only as the things we dream,
Then you and I frail shadow-forms would be,
Whose phantom lips had met eternally
In one long kiss, with none to break the spell, —
We should not be the things which now we seem,
If Life were fashioned as the things we dream.

THE PARTING


LET us go hence,
Nor wretchedly delay,
Wringing our hands, and shedding fruitless tears.
Shall God be cruel at the end of years,
He who first made and sent us on our way?
Some glad new promise dawns with every day, —
Let us go hence.

Whence have we come?
No utterance can tell
From what strange silence slipping through the
 night,
No star-lit god has testified our flight,
Fallen from Heaven or risen up from Hell,
No wisest man has ever answered well,
Whence we have come.

Thus far we came,
Nor knew the hand that led,
Yet we have heard the solemn beat of wings.
Though we distrust the voice of one that sings,
Shall we misdoubt that tender words were said?
His was a kindly shadow that was shed,
As thus we came.

Where shall we go?
The way is far to seek,
No man that journeyed ever yet returned.
We who remain have never yet discerned
Grayness or light, nor any faintest streak
Of red-rimmed suns to make the darkness speak
Whither we go.

Let us go hence,
Nor ask before we go



Wherefore we questioned hopes, or loves, or fears.
Shall God be cruel at the end of years?
Hands that have fashioned guide the hands that
sow.

He who first made us, surely He must know
Why we go hence.

Whither we go,
We cannot hope to say,
“Whence we have come?” What difference does
it make? —

One thing I know, and from it comfort take, —
He who first made us sent us on our way.
So be it night, or some diviner day,
Let us go hence.

THE SCORNER

I WITH the scorners had sat down,
Thorn-twined with thistle was my crown,
And purple bitterness my gown,
When I sat down to scorn.
For I had heard the world's despite
Batter my door with brutal might
And coward-strength till morning-light,
And I was all outworn.

'Twas then I said, "Since Love may be
A shameful thing and wretchedly
A very subtle travesty
On selfishness and lust,

No false distinction will I make,
But in mine own two arms will take
And love Hate for her own sweet sake,
For love I know I must."


The hand of Hate was long and thin,
And sere and parched her yellow skin,
Scarlet her lips with frequent sin,
And arduous with rage.
Her eyes did mindfully condemn
Her fellows, when they brushed her hem
And cowered, as she looked on them
Revenge undulled by age.

"Now all aforetime misery
And wretchedness of mockery
Shall harvest pleasure unto me,"
I falteringly said,

And held the hand of Hate more firm
And dwelt with her a little term,
Despised the rosebud for the worm
Which on its beauty fed.

“And mine shall be the joy of those
Who, love-rejected, yet uprose
To feel Love’s arms about them close
Hid in the cloak of Hate.
Since men have never loved my name
For kindness, then all my fame
Shall tribute be to bulk their shame,
And this shall be my fate.

“Love lives a very little day,
Makes some small splendor on the way,
But who shall point you where she lay
When last year’s lips are dumb?



Love dies with Life, but Hate is strong
To mutilate man's joy with long
Remorse for each most secret wrong,
In years that are to come."

And thus I said, and sat me down
With thorn and thistle for my crown,
And purple bitterness my gown,
When I sat down to scorn.
A girl came drifting listless by
And turned on me a pitying eye.
I felt the rage within me die,
For I was all outworn.

So I uprose and followed where
I saw the shining of her hair
And without memory kissed her there,
Where my new self was born.

Derisiveness and jealousy
Seemed very little things to be,
And those poor doubts which troubled me,
When I sat down to scorn.

AN OLD DESIRE

O to be as Christ was in happy Galilee,
To walk the world with healing and hands of
charity,
To suffer with each cripple till our love should make
him straight,
O to be as Christ was, and die without the gate.

If we had His compassion, what comfort we could
make
For those in dread of dying upon some storm-
tossed lake,
To walk, in spite of tempests, in the valleys of the
sea,
And spend our strength for sinners in deeds of
sympathy.

O to be as Christ was, to die upon a Cross
In some obscurest country, nor count our dying
 loss,
If only by our dangering one bondsman might be
 free,
And turn again from sighing to fields of Galilee.

SOMETIMES BY DAY, BUT MOSTLY
AFTER DARK


WITH smiling face she walked our city streets,
Sometimes by day, but mostly after dark;
About the hour when men and women mark
The progress of their lives, and the heart beats
More laggardly.

When gazing at expanse
Of reeling stars obscured by smoking cloud
Men count the number of their days aloud,
Raising their heads to God with timid glance,
Hoping that, though remote, He may be wise.
About the hour when little children smile
Through parted lips, and smiling, rest awhile
Within their mother's arms with quiet eyes,

Before the great adventure of the day
Startles their tears.

 About the hour of peace
When all things animate have craved release
From living, and a battered disarray
Of broken armies journeys home in sleep.
Then braiding up her wealth of flying hair
She buckled on her silken gown with care,
And flashed the eyes she had forbade to
 weep,
Venturing forth with eager ear to hark
To any insult of the noisome street.
And this she did with very weary feet
Sometimes by day, — but mostly after dark.

Hidden within a doorway as she passed
I heard her sob, and saw her girlish hands
Laid tremulously on the velvet bands



Around her working throat, so that at last
I could not choose but kiss her passing dress
For very pity.

Swiftly around she turned,
Leaning Madonna-like, as one who yearned
To gather in two arms a world's distress,
And on her bosom ease its bleeding brow.
Just for one little moment thus she stooped,
Whilst all her frailty strove anew and grouped
Her childish limbs maternally.

Ah, how

God's mother lent her of her own sweet grace,
And blotted out the eager, famished look,
Restoring to her tenderness, and took
Between her own white hands, and kissed the
face.

I could have loved her as a sister then,
As a young sister who is very weak

And scarcely knows the fitting words to
speak,

Sharing with her the scarlet scorn of men.

A shadow fell between us. Up she leapt
With tear-stained face and bosom panting quick
And arms flung wide, — although her lips were
sick

Of mercenary kisses; yet she swept
An arm around the craning vulture's neck
Bending toward him.

With an idle word
She left me standing in the gloom. I heard
The ripple of her laughter and the check
Of little feet upon the silent night.
And bowed my head and wept, for I had
seen

Her tender soul look out.



What does God mean?

And, if there is a God, can this be right?

About the hour when men and women mark
The progress of their lives, and the heart beats
More laggardly, she walks our city streets,
Sometimes by day, — but mostly after dark.

MEMORIES



I

HIS FIRST COMPANION

TAKING his hand, she led his little feet
Through cloud-packed valleys, — places sad to
see,
Or in her bosom bore him lovingly,
And scattered all abroad her hair to cheat
The mountains of their blackness by the gold
Which triumphed from her forehead o'er his eyes,
Setting his world aflame.

Across the skies
The anger of the gods remorseless rolled,
And rumbled forth the portents of his birth.
But she, with tightened arms, she only smiled,
Bending her fragile body o'er the child,
Kissing his laughing lips, whilst all the earth
Audibly shuddered.

Solitary dead

Strained in their graves to feel her passing by,
Whispering warnings, lest she too should die,
For though she smiled, they heard that her feet
bled.

II

IN FOREIGN LANDS

WE parted cavalierly with a smile,
And almost thought that life would be the same;
When lips had ceased to frame the loved one's name,
That hearts would be content to rest awhile.
Now, desolate in stranger lands I roam;
My listless feet tread unfamiliar ways,
I dream again the pleasant summer days,
And smell the jasmine of the vanished home.
Straying through gay bazaars and blazoned gates,
Ever with tired eyes I seek the quay
To lean far out across the sundering sea,
And feel the steady gaze of one who waits
Unchangeably, knee-deep in autumn grass.

In a lone garden midst gold flowers you stand,
With a red rose for love in either hand,
Weeping, because the hours will not pass.

III

A PORTRAIT

SHE had no manifest accomplishment,
No power to sing the soul into men's eyes,
Nor hands to make the mystic tears arise
When slow she swayed above the instrument.
Nor could she speak with passioned eloquence,
Or choose at will inevitable words,
Flashing her thought with suddenness of birds
Darting across a sky's blue eminence.
She spoke one language only, but 'twas kind;
And when upon the wall her shadow fell
By candle-light, sick people knew full well
Our Saviour had to comfort them outlined
The girlhood of His own sweet mother there.
For feeble folk her hands were diligent.

What though she could not sing? When low she bent
Across my pillow, I could kiss her hair.

TO A YOUNG GIRL SINGING

As you, dear child, sit singing in the dark,
You cannot guess at half the thoughts you bring
With those sad tremolos and sobbing tones;
Of feet which stumble over ragged stones
And grief intolerable you sing, and sing,
And make me lonely, weeping in the dark.

You cannot know of voyages ill-sought
To foreign lands where greenness utterly
Has perished from the parched and shallow shore.
But, as you older grow, then more and more
You will not sing of them, — and so with me,
For I have sailed on voyages ill-sought.

You have not heard the ancient world-grief wail
Of all we suffer as we onward go,
For you are young. I see your moonlit face,

Whilst Life's profoundest tumults you retrace,
Sweet and unhaggard. No, you cannot know
Of men who hear the ancient world-grief wail.

You sing of all the things which I have lost,
Of far-off, tender, ill-remembered times,
So that at last I feel the silken touch,
The straying hands of those loved overmuch,
And dear, dead women gone to distant climes, —
Dearer than once, because they now are lost.

Here on Life's headland, facing out to sea,
I hear Time's restless waters roar and roll,
Approach with crested onset, ebb and flow;
Day's tragic splendor in the West hangs low,
And night will shortly swallow up the whole,
And leave me silent, — facing out to sea.

And here we sit in solitude and weep,
You, singing of the pains you have not felt,

Unmanning me with sobbings and with tears.
So calm and innocent your face appears
As Mary Mother's was before she dwelt
In sight of Calvary, — and had to weep.

O cease! Your singing terrifies my heart
With re-awakened passions, counted dead.
For as you strike the keys, I hear you say
How in a perfect season, once in May,
You knew a gladness exquisite, — now fled.
Of your compassion cease, — and ease my heart.

O child, dear child, your feet have far to tread,
And you shall know the heartbreak and the
throb

Of friends foregone, and some day you will weep,
As I weep now, when in some distant deep
And solemn night your ears have caught the sob
Of singing voices, — you have far to tread.

Those fresh young lips which musically speak
Of my remoter sorrows and old shames
Shall hungry be as loves less frequent grow,
And then it is, poor child, that you will know
The meanings of these weak, ill-worded names,
Which other lips less tutored then shall speak.

* * * * *

As you, dear child, sit singing in the dark,
You cannot guess at half the thoughts you bring
With those sad tremolos and sobbing tones.
Of feet which stumble over ragged stones
And grief intolerable, you sing, and sing,
And leave me lonely, — weeping in the dark.

THROUGH SUFFERING TO LOVE

“O WILL ye sing Love’s song with me,
And we will walk Life’s way forever
And gather flowers all the day
At gloaming time their buds dissever,
Taking our joy where’er it be;
O will ye sing Love’s song with me?”

“I cannot sing Love’s song with thee.”

“O will ye clasp the hand of me,
And talk with me, your heart unbending,
Of all the ills which blacken Life
And give to no new day a mending,
Taking our joy where’er it be;
O will ye clasp the hand of me?”

“I cannot clasp the hand of thee.”

“O will ye bear the wounds of me,
And share the pains of Life together,
And limp with me along Love’s Way,
Nor ask for giving, neither whether
For us may any pleasure be;
O will ye bear the wounds of me?”

“Yes, I will bear the wounds of thee.”

THE LAMENT FOR PROSERPINE

OH, fair the garden must have been
That thou, dear maid, shouldst tarry there
To wreath bright flowers in thy hair,
Where old-time longings swell the air.
And glad and joyous was the scene,
And fresh the woodlands were, I ween,
And fair the garden must have been,
That thou, dear maid, shouldst tarry there.
We weep, sweet God, we sigh for thee,
Beloved of all, Proserpine.

And cool the crystal streams must run
That thou shouldst quit the haunts of men
To wander down the rhythmic glen,

To languish nigh the willowed fen.
Sicilian wilds by thee undone
The piety of love have won.
Oh, cool the crystal streams must run
That thou shouldst quit the haunts of men.
We weep, sweet God, we sigh for thee,
Beloved of all, Proserpine.

Oh, slow must sway the skyward palm
That thou shouldst choose the life remote
To hearken to the quavered note
That falters from the throstle's throat,
Where life submerged in lyric calm,
Moves innocent of fear's alarm.
Oh, slow must sway the skyward palm
That thou shouldst choose the life remote.
We weep, sweet God, we sigh for thee,
Beloved of all, Proserpine.

And calm must dread Night gather there
That thou shouldst linger in his gloom
To pluck the panting poppy bloom
Sunk 'twixt deep breasts to give him room.
On Enna's plains grim Night is fair,
Beslumbered dreams yield visions rare.
Oh, calm must dread Night gather there
That thou shouldst linger in his gloom,
We weep, sweet God, we sigh for thee,
Beloved of all, Proserpine.

There stars must weep with fainter sound
Than in the steep Olympic land,
That thou shouldst rise with outstretched hand
To soothe their sound-suspended strand,
Else why, belovèd, art thou found
Where all in unvoiced love is drowned?
There stars must weep with fainter sound

KNOWLEDGE WHICH PASSES UNDER-
STANDING

If He lived or died, I do not know,
For who shall disprove the words of the dead,
And who may approve of the wisdom they said,
That lips of dust uttered so long ago?
And where He is buried, I may not know.

Like a ravelled ray of early morn
He painfully travelled, yielding the keys
Of God's great desire unto men of the seas,
Because they had watched when the stars were
born;

And day grew complete in the early morn.

If He lived or died, I cannot say,
But loneliness knows the sound of His name;

That men could imagine such love is the same
To me as a living of yesterday,
And words which God speaks are the prayers
men say.

So the thought of Christ is proof to me
He has not departed and is not dead;
The words of compassion men say that He said,
And delicate deeds He did tenderly,
He does and He says even now to me.

If He lived or died, I may not know,
For who shall disprove the words of the dead,
Or who may approve of the wisdom they said?
For me He is not of the long ago,
But speaks in the morn of my life, I know.

THE HOME SONG

As a bird spreads wide wings on the day of re-
turning,
And strives oversea in a passion of yearning,
I lean o'er the world which divides me from you,
And I struggle anew.

As a wind in the North travels forth on its journey,
Yet turns from the South at the end of the tourney,
Sore-wounded and spent through the waves and the
foam,
So I press again home.

As a poor foolish child who has strayed and
relented,
Has shared in your loneliness, shared and re-
pentcd,

Who late in the evening unlatches the gate,
With great peace, so I wait.

With desire as one who remembers a face,
Revealed by the moonlight in some secret place,
Where birds have ceased singing and love is
abroad,
And the dew's on the sward, —

It is thus I recover your smile in my dreams,
The past is made glad by the back-flowing
streams,
The present is anguished with longing for you,
And I struggle anew.

For your face it is, Mother, I see ever burning
With passionate eyes and the hope of returning,
Which calls and recalls me by night and by day,
To the breast where I lay.

As a bird spreads wide wings when the homeland
discerning

It strives oversea in the pain of its yearning,

I lean o'er the world which divides me from you,

And I struggle anew.

THE PARCÆ

HID in dark, tenebrous glooms of the North,
Far from Elysian groves of fair Greece,
Chanting and weaving the Daughters of Wrath,
Far from Arcadian thickets of peace,
Spin, spin, spin.

Pitiless, passionless, woefully wild,
Crooning weird chants of impossible bliss,
Three Sisters senescent who never bore child,
Sad Sisters whose lips never met in a kiss,
Spin, spin, spin.

Atropos dread grasping scissors of steel,
Stern Lachesis disentangling the skein,

Clotho infallibly turning the wheel,
Stilling low murmurings called forth by pain,
Spin, spin, spin,

Tortuous, tempest-rent caverns they haunt,
Obscure, ambiguous chasms of ice,
Stern and forbidding the Sisterhood gaunt,
Twining with virtue the dark strands of vice,
Spin, spin, spin.

Counting the days of felicitous man,
Man with his hopes of the joys yet in store,
Far from the nymph-haunted woodlands of Pan,
Three Sisters alone on a ghost-haunted shore,
Spin, spin, spin.

Crouched at their feet ineluctable Death,
Near him his satellite Lethean Sleep,

Smites lusty man with his opiate breath,
Mindful of poppy-lands dreamy and deep,
Spin, spin, spin.

Merging to-day with the days that are past,
Fusing the Past with the days that will be,
Three Sisters defiant midst tempest and blast,
Three Sisters begirt by monotonous sea,
Spin, spin, spin.

Vacantly scanning immutable space,
Wearily waiting for ease from their toil,
Swift through deft fingers frail silken cords race,
Red round pale foreheads fierce scorpions coil,
Spin, spin, spin.

Wilfully passion-spent, woefully wild,
Secretly, stealthily, sapping man's life,

Three Sisters senescent who never bore child,
Far from glad South-lands where woman is wife,
Spin, spin, spin.

Hid in dark, tenebrous glooms of the North,
Far from Elysian groves of fair Greece,
Chanting and weaving the Daughters of Wrath,
Far from Arcadian thickets of peace,
Spin, spin, spin.

FORSAKEN SELVES


ACROSS an open common land,
Down a secret glade,
Where the solemn yew-trees stand
Sombrely arrayed,
Far from sound of falling seas,
Almost quite forgot,
Girdled round with greeneries
Lies a silent spot.

The village of forsaken selves, —
No man knows the spot.
Here no weary workman delves
Round his garden plot.

Little children grown to men,
All have gone away,
Left a memory of when
Fields were white with May.

A very happy resting-place
This was wont to be,
Every window held a face
That was known to me;
Some were old and some were young
When I went away,
On each humblest hedgerow hung
Something that was gay.

The village of forsaken selves, —
No man knows the spot.
On the narrow garden shelves
Stand forget-me-not,



Blue as when I planted them
Years ago in May,
Fresh as when I slanted them
Outward to the day.

At night I rise and travel there,
All alone I go,
Looking straight ahead, nor dare
Tell another, so
I should surely break the spell
Nor return again,
Where my younger brothers dwell,
Should I make it plain.

Regret will sometimes sadden me
That I went away,
As I wander fretfully
Through the common day,

Till the moon rides forth and sings
Of a silent spot,
Blue, beyond the edge of things,
With forget-me-not.

THE THREE TRAVELLERS

LIFE met Love upon the way,
But Life would not tarry;
"See, I bear the hopes of men,
And their griefs I carry.
I am he whom angels sought
Before the world's beginning;
I am Folly, I am Thought,
Loud Lament and Singing."

Death met Life upon the way,
Spoke, and bade him follow
Till the night grew out of sight
And the sky was hollow.

"I am older than the moon
And witnessed God's upbringing;
Nothingness I am, and soon
Shall be backward winging."

Love found Life upon the way,
Empty-eyed and fearful,
Flung his arms around Life's neck
Till he grew less tearful.

"I am he who fashioned thee
Of God and man the kernel;
Life which knows and follows me
Shall become eternal."

WHEN HE RIDES BY

ONCE was a time when I was young
And heard the mountains speak with me,
And every river had a tongue
Which cried my name most audibly.
All this was very long ago,
How long, I scarcely dare to know, —
When I was young.

Once was a night in summer-time,
When harvest moons were round and red,
I heard the voices of the dead
Mutter beneath the church-yard lime.
All this was very long ago,
How long, I scarcely dare to know, —
When moons were red.

Once was a time when I had thought
To do some mighty noble deed,
To be He whom the world had sought
Throughout the ages at its need.
All this was very long ago,
How long, I scarcely dare to know, —
A noble deed.

Now at this time I hear again
The monster clang of armèd foes,
And struggle forth with stress and strain
To where the back-bent banner flows.
Where new-made angels mounting go,
I join God's spearsmen crouching low,
And strive again.

Crushed in the battle I may fall,
And none will notice how I die,

Yet, when the trumpets cease to call,
I'll hear my Captain riding by;
As in His locks the war-winds blow,
He'll see my wounds, and then He'll know, —
When He rides by.



EMOTIONS, BEING FOUR
PHASES IN BELIEF



I

THE HERETIC

Go, writhe thy hands and bend thy servile knees
Before the God who tells thee He is wise.
He made thy mouth and gave thee careful eyes,
Such as suffice for whispered flatteries.
The night is dark, the storm drives on apace,
Yet will He hear the echo of thy prayer,
And hearing, shake His mighty saffron hair
Thick o'er His eyes, and sleeping, hide His face.
Tell Him that we are happy in the night,
That life is pleasantest when lived alone,
For night brings visions of His quiet throne,
Which only come to exiles from the light.
Then stretch far out and greet with lying lips
His cold white hands in sweet humility,
For God is great, and sleeps eternally.
But what of us who sail the sea in ships?

II

THE AGE OF BELIEF

“O to believe!” a tortured spirit cried,
“To fling abroad the portals of my soul
And hear His footsteps echo through the whole
Wide circumstance of life, till eventide
Steals through each portico with thoughts of rest.
O to believe!”

So God gave stout belief
Unto His child, and said, “If this be chief
Of all his strange desires, it may be best
To take away the horror of his doubt.
He shall believe.”

But when his grief was shorn,
And spacious stood the temple doors — forlorn
Of their old tenant, — with an anguished shout
The man rose up and beckoned after God,

And vilified His mantle with the stain

Of stamping feet.

“Give me my doubts again!”

The dented silence proved where God had trod.

III

LOYALTY TO CHRIST

HERE if to sin should be the chief device
Of our strong living, and the mock display
Of pale resistance horribly at bay,
And push of pike, and knights down-trodden twice,
Who rise again with blood-bespattered face,
To strike with nerveless hands one weakling blow,
Before to music funeral they go
Into the night to an abyssmal place
Where stars nor any tears are heard to fall:—
If this be all, then let me join the game
With chivalrous endeavor and though lame
With many doubtings, though the trumpet-call
Comes muffled to my sin-bedeafened ears,
I will rebel against this grim design.
“Christ and His Cross!” I throng the crashing line,
Rushing with crimsoned saints upon Hell’s spears.

IV

THE HAVEN

THERE is a haven to the soul of man,
A quiet place and sheltered from the sea,
Where hurricane nor storm works wantonly,
And never any thunder-godhead ran.
No populous array of travelled ships
Strain at the anchor in the hidden bay,
But one small coracle waits there alway
And somnolent in sleepy waters dips.
Alone and kind beneath a gentle sun,
With torchlike eyes and trailing wine-red hair,
A patient, watching friend is stationed there
To greet the voyager, his journey done.
Single the hardship, with no other shared,
For every soul one haven is prepared.

THE CHOICE

WHERE shall we go to-day,
This fair bright day which you and I have sought,
Of all the days that were and are to be?
When I was sick, you whispered low to me
Of how on winter nights you oft had thought
Of such a day.

Of such a day I thought
When life despaired of me, and I of it,
And all things wearied me that I had known.
Wisdom was vanity, and Death alone
For one so heartsore seemed companion fit,
Then of this day I thought.

This is a morning fit
For our two lives; past days are out of mind,

The future we forewent for this one day.
To-night the gods may do as list they may,
To-day our hands are free to what they find,
 Upon this morning fit.

O roses we shall find,
And poppies for forgetfulness shall weave,
And sip the purpled poison of the vine.
For one rare hour we two will be divine,
Suspecting nothing of the things that grieve,—
 And only roses find.

We must not fret nor grieve;
For all the weight of unrelenting years,
God gives to every man one holiday,
And often it is Death, and some do say
The joy is great to those who shed least tears,—
 Therefore we must not grieve.

Where shall we go to-day?

I scarcely know, — and yet this land of Death

Sounds full of rest for such as you and me,

For there we two shall be from heartache free

And turbulence, and lust, and labored breath, —

There let us go to-day.

THE VALLEY OF SLEEP

I a valley haunt had taken
And had named it for mine own,
By all violence forsaken
Where my heart might dwell alone,
And I peopled it with faces
Shadow-shaped, and prayerful places
Such as gods had never known.

I surrounded it with lilies
And I hedged it from the light,
There I scattered daffodillies
Through the thickets of the night,
And I grew a tent of roses
Where the drowsy poppy dozes,
Unaware of sound or sight.

“Here,” I said, “I will be quiet
In whatever way I can;
Neither fear, nor dead men’s riot,
Hornèd feet, nor pipes of Pan,
Ever can my peace dissever,
For this hollow land can never
Dwelt in be by maid or man.”

Then abandoned unto dreaming
I unloosed the robe of sleep,
And renewed my soul in deeming
That the moan of those that weep
Never more could mar the measure
Of my uneventful pleasure,
Nor the sigh of those that reap.

Thus the jonquils gave their fragrance
For a moment and a day,

And the lily thrust her gold lance
Where the deepest darkness lay,
Whilst the mingled smell of myrtle
Fringed the trimming of Death's kirtle
All along the heedless way.

But a vigilance diviner
And more desperate kept guard,
With a chanting in the minor
Which the silken petals jarred,
Till they trembled at its motion,
Bowed and perished in devotion,
And their leaves the blue grass starred.

Then I wept and left my valley
Shadow-fashioned, flower-free,
Till I found a yew-tree alley
Where the day glowed distantly,

And encountered gaunt gray creatures
Labor-spent, with famished features
Tenanted by misery.

* * * * *

I a valley haunt had taken
And had named it for mine own,
By all violence forsaken
Where my heart might dwell alone,
And I peopled it with faces,
Parted lips in prayerful places,
Such as gods had never known.

THE ONLY TRUE GOD

HERE is a Christ sufficient for my need,
His name is Jesus, so they say to me,
And once His brow was red with agony,
Therefore this Christ sufficeth for my need.

For gods who die and suffer willingly
Are kindred unto men, and this one had
Much loneliness, when dying, He was glad,
And kissed the hands which nailed Him to the
tree.

Here is a Christ sufficient for my need,
For other Christs I've worshipped and outworn,
The Christs of impotence, — of Ease, of Scorn,
The Christ of Others satisfies my need.

For He in solitude lived out His life,
And at the hands of friends met grave despite,
Yet ever loved and prayed for them all night,
And, though much tempted, stayed His hands from
 strife.

Here is a Christ all equal to my need,
For He, a God, laid down His life for me,
And comforted a thief on Calvary,
Therefore this Christ sufficeth all my need.

AS FOR THE DEAD

WHY should we pluck fresh flowers for our dead,
And add new death to that which went before?
We shall not ease them with our posies, nor
Shall we repose them with the tears we shed,—
For they are dead.

The poor dead cannot smell the blooms we bring,
For they are still, and straight, and very cold,
And have no knowledge of the way we fold
Earth's tender mantle round them slumbering,
Nor love we bring.

Whether their graves lie far apart and bare,
Or scattered through the ocean's restless sand,

Or intimate with lilac and garland
Of God's wild rose, they may not choose to care
What pains we bear.

We placed a sculptured cross above her grave,
And this was lichen-covered ere the Spring,
And all obliterate the lettering
Of valorous religious hope we gave
To cheer her grave.

In life her piteous lips were fraught with sighs,
For stronger passion than was ours to give,
Till Grief grew into Death, and we that live,
Down closed with love the disillusioned eyes, —
With love and sighs.

No more she hears the hurry of the wind,
And waving of the once accustomed trees,

And whispering of rustled greeneries,
For unto her whatever blows is kind, —
 Tempest or wind.

Why should we pluck fresh flowers for our
 dead?

Nay, let them rest ungrieved a little while,
With upturned face outworn of tear or smile,
Lest thought of us by them remembered
 Should fret our dead.

Released from labor, quit of song and rhyme,
With unemotioned eyes they rest awhile,
Nor tremble at the rasping of the file
Of Death upon the rusty lock of Time,
 Nor song, nor rhyme.

No gift of ours shall now disquiet them,
For they were tired, as we soon shall be,

Of loving and of living endlessly.
In weariness they touched Death's trailing hem,
And Death kissed them.

They stretch in level, uneventful sleep,
Quite unaware of any need of us,
And these who once with pain went forth to reap
Have stayed their hands from harvesting, and thus
At peace they sleep.

OXFORD

GRAY walls, gray towers, slowly-motioned streams,
With one gray cloud against a drowsy sky,
And tall green trees which fold their arms on
high

Athwart the blue, with head down-bowed in
dreams

Of ancient comrades and forgotten days.

Nothing is here that moves, — peril of night,

Nor setting suns come here to fret or fright

Peace-thriven spires with gloom or sudden blaze.

Thus have I seen you silently arise

When life was weariful with tasks outworn

Of sorry pleasantness, when hands were torn

About abandoned labors; — then mine eyes

Returned to your inviolate repose
For comforting and changelessness of sight,
Where lovelessness, nor love o'er-reach their
height,
And never any breath of frenzy blows.

A NEW AFFECTION

"O DEATH, sweet Death," I cried,

"Your arms are swift and wide

To hold me fast.

"And this shall be the last

Of all the words I cast

Into the night.

"My strength has taken flight

And sense of wrong and right,

To thee I fly."

But while I spoke the sky

Sprang from the plains on high,

On wings of red.

"O Life, sweet Life," I said,

"I thought my faith was dead,

Hold thou me fast."

WHEN DAY WAS DONE

ALL day beneath the dreadful sun,
I labored till my task was done,
And thought of all the stars I'd see
When from the clouds Eternity
Looked out with quiet eyes, —
And day was done.

All day I hummed a little song,
Which does unto the stars belong,
A song of pleasure, not of words,
Such as our Maker gave to birds,
To trill when they were glad, —
A little song.

All day I watched for weary men,
And came to them with kindness when

I thought that they had need of me,
And sang to them all secretly
And hidden like the birds, —
 To weary men.

And when at last I too was sad,
And very little courage had,
With lonely children then I played,
And out of grief some comfort made,
For then I saw them glad, —
 Though I was sad.

So when at last the day was done,
And gone the dreadful flaming sun,
I saw God smiling peacefully
With wise wide eyes on mine and me,
And learnt my song anew, —
 When day was done.

A CRADLE SONG

HUSH, little baby, sleep for a while,
Soon you will journey many a mile,
Back to my bosom limp home at last
When death is ended and sorrow is past.

Hush, little baby, mother is nigh,
Mothers are always somewhere near by,
Present or absent, living or dead,
Night finds them lingering round a child's bed.

Hush, little baby, smile while you can,
There will be crying when you're a man,
Gather dream-daisies, smile through your sleep,
Morning is coming and soon you must weep.

Hush, little baby, mother will pray
Jesus to love you, let come what may,
Jesus to give me Mary's strong heart,
Courage to trust Him however we part.

Hush, little dearest, mother will weep,
Love is my sorrow, sleep, dear one, sleep.
Christ had a mother, Jesus must know
Valleys of mourning where mothers must go.

Hush, little baby, sleep for a while,
Soon you will journey many a mile,
Back to my bosom limp home at last
When death is ended and sorrow is past.

DOLOR ULTIMUS

WITH the passion of life and the pain of past
pleasure

I trifled a moment, and gained as my measure
Baffled desire for the things which are dead,
And memories fled.

In a morning of glory I wakened with singing
To see a pale earth-daughter daintily stringing
Daisies and rosebuds with thorns for my head, —
The rose-leaves were red.

She is gone, she is gone, and I cannot recover
The sound of her voice, nor the face of my lover,
All its sweet outlines are utterly fled,
As though she were dead.

Like snow on swift streams in a yellow No-
vember,

The memory perished, nor can I remember
Aught of her utterance, naught that was said,
Save this, "It is fled."

* * * * *

With the passion of life and the pain of past
pleasure

I trifled a moment, and gained as my measure
Baffled desire for the things which are dead,—
And sorrow instead.



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EXPERIENCES





I

AT THE BACK OF THINGS

In a lone garden where no foot hath trod,
Long have I lingered through a summer's night,
Watching the flowers of my dear delight
Rise up intangible, and rising nod
Their shadow plumes, nor fear for any God
With devastating sword; but fling their height
Aghast against the stars, remote from sight
Of men tumultuous and ironshod.

Hither I came when days were overlong,
And thoughtfulness had left me still unwise.
When Life's loud minstrelsy confused a song
Of slower measure, whilst the vine-wreathed
 throng
Mirthlessly circled under ashen skies,—
Hither I came, with red, regretful eyes.

II

LOVE IN A GARDEN

At last the fragrance with the bloom was gone,
And naught was left of all my joy but this,
The bitter memory of a loveless kiss,
The gray foreboding of a sunless dawn.
Around me lay Love's Eden, quite forlorn,
With scattered petals and wild disarray
Of lilies trampled whilst the night was gay,
And vines of all their purple fruitage shorn.
Through distant tree-tops, like a silver thread,
Whitened the day. The rumored tread of One,
Who walking spaciously is clothed in light,
Startled the silence into panic fright.
But when above the pines rose up the sun,
I saw a Stranger with a thorn-clad head.

III

WHEN THE MUSIC CEASED

THE last strain poised and shattered on the
air,

THE bow relaxed upon the snapping string.
With head bent low and dim-eyed wondering,
We rose to go. Each had the fixèd stare
Of one whose gaze is on some holy sight;
Loves unfulfilled, contritions of dead years,
Songs half-composed, kisses washed out with
tears.

Visions which perished in the solemn night,
Rose up repentant from the wailing past —
Passions burnt out, proclaiming death in life.
From gloomy lands of thirstiness and strife
We crippled prodigals crept home at last,

And watched through glowing casements all our
loss

Grotesquely gestured on regretful walls.

Reproachful Christs looked out from Judgment
Halls,

Dreaming of martyrdom and of the Cross.

THE ASSURANCE OF LOVE

Love's in the world to-day,
And this I know,
Because last night the clouds were inky black,
The silver strings of music looped and slack
With all their sweet vibrations flown away
To where the dead things go.

And this I know,
Because this morn the sun shines out again,
And sorrow with the moon is on the wane.

Love's in the world to-night,
And this I know,
Because the sun has set in blue and red,
And my soft-voiced acquaintance, Joy, is dead.
Minstrelsy, mirth, and song have taken flight,

And here no breezes blow.

This must be so,

Because Love's habit is to be more kind

To those whose faith is frail, whose heart is blind.

BORDERLAND

So near to Life are we,
That we might kiss the feet of God almost,
And hope to dwell upon the quiet coast
Of His serenity.

So near to Death are we,
That God might quench us ere we had begun,
Dash on most distant stars His happy sun
In blank obscurity.

So dear to God are we,
That He will guard our ways whate'er befall.
Our ill-made coracle in calm or squall
Sails on His charity.

A PRAYER FOR SLEEP

GIVE unto us to sleep
With folded hands as though in faith we prayed,
And placid eyes, in darkness undismayed,
While through the night we sleep.

And when we sleep may we
Bring to our dreams a kind reposeful face,
Nor look on any sight that would debase
Us, ere we look on Thee.

Give unto us to dream
Not of our life, for it was indiscreet,
But of Thy face. So may our sleep be sweet
While in the night we dream.

Thus in our sleep to be
A gentle self when on Thy face we gaze,
Ever returning at the end of days
To sleep in sight of Thee.

AFTERWARDS

WHEN all the words are said that have been given
And we have lost the fight, as well may be,
Then those who've watched, and those who've
 striven
 Shall sleep eternally.

When all the songs which once Love could not
 utter,
Have crumbled to decay as have the lips,
We shall be safe — no one will mutter
 Aught of our frequent slips.

When Life's old loyalties no longer linger
Where, by the Hearth of Hearts, Love had his
 bed,

Then shall we see Time crook his finger,
 Bowing his ancient head.

Hatreds outhated, and loves undiscovered,
Then shall immortally with Death be dead,
Even the cross whereon we suffered
 Quite unrememberèd.

Gods we have fashionèd with Gods we've
 broken,
Lords of our midnight dreads, fitful as rain,
Each shall be known. This is the token,
 They died when we were slain.

Thus when all words are said that have been
 given
And we have lost the fight, as well may be,

Then those who've watched, with those who've
striven

Rest unregretfully.

Then can no voice of wrath our peace dis sever,
Then shall we sway on gray, full floods of sleep,
Trailing our hands, flow on forever,

On to an unknown deep.

THE SONG OF THE SULLIED BROW

First Woman

“DRAW nearer, press thine ear against my lips.
Nay, leave my hand. I think another stands
To claim it, when the sun has left the sky.
Why does Day tarry? Bid him to begone,
For my Belovèd waits while he delays.

Second Woman

Nay, not so petulant.

First Woman

The sunlight dies,
And still a little glory I discern
Hover reluctantly about the dome
Which crowns religiously yon white-walled town.

And while it lingers, yet a little space
Is left to me to murmur of His name.
You share my story. Look upon my face,
And mark the scar where Sin once kissed my
brow,
About the singing season of the year,
About the time when meadow-sweet is rife,
And marred my beauty ere it had begun.
There all is irretrievably engraved
In scarlet lettering and yellow skin,
And shall remain in token of that act
Till with the night another shall draw nigh
And take away the records of my life,
And give His kiss which I have lived to
earn.
You, too, have sinned, poor child, and know the
shame
Of trampled lilies, and you know of love



Which takes a girl's resistless, trustful hand
And leads her passive through the gates of Hell.
Oh, that I might forget those wanton days,
And the rich bed of roses where I lay
Bruising my breasts with soft adulteries,
And riotously singing evil words
Of a barbaric people long since dead.
Now that I come to die, I want to think
Only of Him, and yet these shadows rise.
And still I hear the frenzied burst of song,
Wrought out on brass and low-strung instruments,
Which first enchanted my young life away.
You share my story, look upon my face,
My brow is sullied, but it shall be white.
Soon shall the latest sunlight die away,
Soon shall the white-walled town fade out of
sight,

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Soon shall His footfall sound among the stars,
And once again I'll loosen all my hair,
Kneeling with head bent low, until I meet
The travelled feet of Him who claims my tears.

Is it yet night? Oh, tell me, is it night?
A mist has risen up before my eyes,
And the white wall which girdles in the town
Fades out of sight.

Second Woman

Not yet, O mother mine,
For still Jerusalem is gold and red
And still the temple dome flings back the skies,
Making our city burn with forks of flame.
But while day lingers, yet a little space
Is left to you to murmur of His name.
I share your story. Look upon my face,

And tell me what He said, and how He looked
When first He caught your little trembling hands
And lifted up your face and met your eyes.
I share your story, — tell me all He said!

First Woman

I had been dancing to the sound of lutes,
Dancing and dancing with a broken heart,
And as my strength went out I seemed to steal
Back to a garden which was known to me,
Where stood white flowers, sown in lily-time.
Then all the torture of my vain regrets
And brutal insolence of those that watched
A pale girl dancing in the hour of prayer,
And the sad memories of those I loved —
And satisfied, — and lost, — O ages since, —
Vanished, and left me standing quite alone
In a white garden, — far from sound of seas.

I poised, and outward leaned to pluck a bud, —
And fell. A mirthless, drunken laugh uprose;
But I lay still, and labored with my breath,
Closing my eyes, and wished that I might die.
Then on a sudden all their laughter ceased,
And arms were delicately placed beneath
Me, and I felt the sweeping beard of Him,
As stooping low He gathered up myself,
And bore me to a fountain-playing place
And lay me down,—and looked, and smiled,
and left.

Long time beneath the quiet stars I sought
Oblivion for my soul-defiling fame,
And loss of memory for everything,
Save for the sweet possession of those arms
That had so passionately possessed my soul.
Soft through June twilight came His tender voice,
Close followed by a hoarse derisive shout;

Vile as I was, I could not then forbear
To weeping go and nurture His poor feet
Upon my breasts, and comfort them with tears.
They had despised us both. But, oh, His hands!
I felt them wander through my tumbled hair
And kissed His feet, kissed them before the world.

Is it yet night? I used to fear the night
Lest I should feel the frequent wings of Death.
But now black moonless hours are my desire.
In utter darkness I can see Him best,
In utter darkness He first came to me.
You share my story. — Tell me, is it night?

Second Woman

No! But I hear the solemn mourners' tread,
And our white town is black and undiscerned,
Save where the temple raises up its spear,
Slashing across the sky a jagged wound.

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And here and there are blood-bedabbled clouds.
But, O my mother, tell me more of Him
Who sent you out to claim us fallen girls,
And make us ready for His kiss at death.
“My brow is sullied, but it shall be white.”
So ran your words. O, tell me, ere you die,
Ever or any time shall I receive
His kiss? O, tell me truly all He said.

First Woman

We two have walked along the self-same road,
And know the color of the flowers we met?

Second Woman


Yes, mother, yes. We know. You found me there
Where every flower and fruit is tinged with flame.
You whispered tender secrets of His name,
And how my scarlet forehead should be white

When He had kissed my hot, reproachful shame.
O mother, tell me why He sent you there
To us poor girls, so drunken with our sin.

First Woman

When He had placed His hands upon my head
And looked into my face with gentle eyes,
I yearned to feel His lips upon my brow,
But dared not ask Him. He saw my desire.
Through love I fell, and was raised up by love,
Yet could I not entirely forsake
Human endearments under summer trees.
I could not curb my longing for His lips.
Sometimes I wandered through Gethsemane
And stooped beneath a bough with upturned face,
Hoping and fearing for — I scarce knew what.
And He would press my hand, and not condemn,
But warming some sad flower into life

Would lay a white wild-flower on my breast
And kiss each petal ere He laid it there.
I did not understand — and then He died.
Therefore was I beside His sepulchre
Whilst in the trees still slumbered that gray morn.
Kneeling with tired eyes and out-stretched face
I waited. Soon I heard the fallen leaves
Turn at the sound of a familiar tread.
Pausing beside me, tremulous, He pressed
Upon my forehead one white woodland flower.
And still I waited with my weary eyes
Until I heard His footfall die away.
Remote through silver olive trees there shone
One lonely star which seemed to beckon me.
At last I knew the meaning of the flower.
My brow, though sullied, shall be white again.
For I have gathered you, poor withered flowers,
And borne you in my passionate, wayward breast,



Giving the kiss He could not give to me,
And warming all your petals back to life.
You shall be white, and shall deserve His kiss,
If you will share my story with your lips.

Second Woman

Look upon me, O look upon my face.
I will go forth along the dancing way,
The way I danced in till I saw your face,
Sweet Mary Magdalene. I'm glad to die,
And brave to die, where dying means disgrace.
Being a woman, I love utterly.
See my young hands, — are they not strong to hold
Lost girlhood in the gentle grasp of Love?
See my young lips, — shall they not kiss the eyes
Of many a life-sick sister of the quest?
See my young feet, — they too shall bleed and
faint,

As yours have done, in seeking out our kind,
And whispering the secrets of His name.
Men will despise me, spit upon my name,
Cursing the face they once sought out in lust.
But I shall smile, remembering your face,
And write upon my palms your gentle name.
So will I share your story to the end,
And He shall grant us each our evening kiss.
My brow is sullied, but it shall be white.

First Woman

Has the day vanished, little sisterling?

Second Woman

The wound is healed, the red clouds gone away,
The white-walled town is black and blotted out,
The mourners' torches burnt away in smoke.
Remotely through the gleaming olive trees
Shines one bright star which seems to beckon me."



First Woman

Come quick! 'Tis He! I hear the quivering
Of last year's fallen leaves. Raise up my head
And make me strong to kneel before He comes.
Last time the hair was gold that wiped His
feet,—

To-night 'tis gray, and scant with over-use
In that first service which I wrought for Him.
My brow is sullied, but it shall be white.
O Jesus, Jesus, so long waited for!
He kisses me! See, child, He kisses me!
Upon the brow, lips, eyes, and tear-stained hair!
He kisses me, see our mouths meet! My
brow —

* * * * *

She knelt beside the kneeling dead and kissed
Her aged hollow eyes and weary hands,
Well-knowing how each brutal scar was won.

She saw the scarlet brow grow glorious,
And the sin-sickened face forget its past,
Which others had remembered cruelly.
Loosing her tresses, she, with many tears,
Made comfort for the dead who washed His feet.
Kneeling beside her in the starlit room
She wiped with hair the bruised, despised feet,
And shared her story, gazing on her face.
This done, she hurried out into the night,
And found without the gate a withered flower,
And warmed the frail forsaken back to life,
Kissing each petal with her piteous lips.
When the day dawned the flower had turned to
white,
And thus she knew that He would come to her.

Her brow was sullied, — He would make it white.

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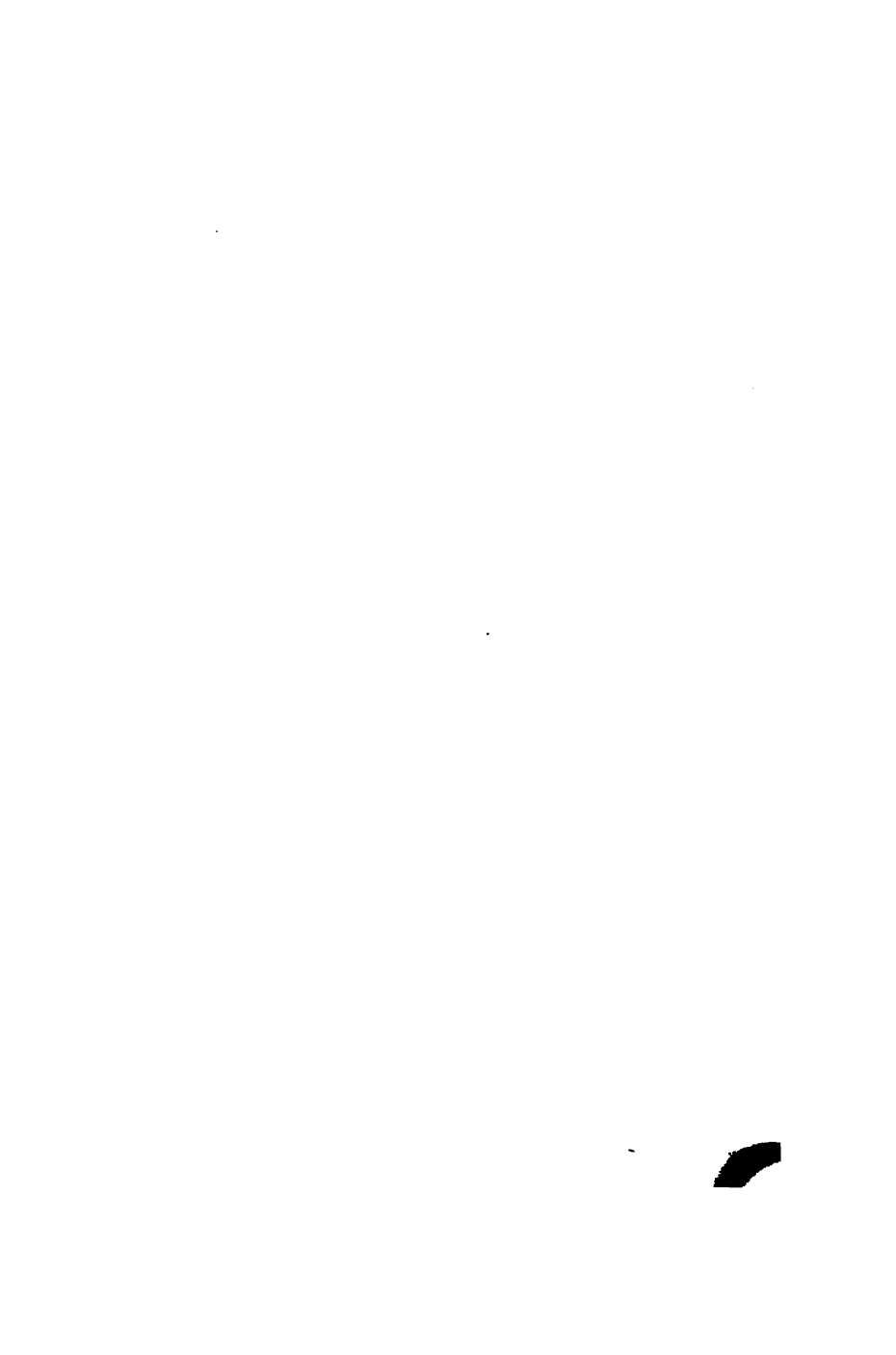
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